

## ***FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** October 11, 2012

**Agenda Item:** Brucellosis Working Group Background Information

**Division/Bureau:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Informational

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 1 hour

### **Background**

Brucellosis results from an infection caused by *Brucella abortus* bacteria and is known to exist in wild bison and elk and occasionally domestic livestock within the Greater Yellowstone Area. Recent livestock cases in the GYA were linked to transmission from wildlife, with elk being the most likely source. While significant negative impacts to elk have not been clearly identified in Montana, brucellosis can impact the livestock industry and individual producers. Changes in USDA-APHIS rules reduced the likelihood of entire states losing brucellosis-free status because of isolated livestock cases, but put increased focus on areas where brucellosis is known to exist in wildlife. As a result, the Montana Board of Livestock established a designated surveillance area in Montana in 2010. Livestock growers within the DSA are required to increase their cattle testing and vaccination efforts.

Montana surveillance efforts using blood tests to determine exposure rates (seroprevalence) to *B. abortus* in elk began in the late 1980s. Seroprevalence estimates for GYA elk from the late 1980s and early 1990s were below 2 percent. Surveillance conducted within the last 10-15 years reveal what appear to be increasing seroprevalence in some elk populations.

In response to (1) seroprevalence rates, (2) livestock infections, (3) the DSA, and (4) debate among livestock and wildlife interests, in fall 2011 the FWP Commission endorsed the concept of a citizen working group to explore elk management guidelines in areas with brucellosis. After creating an issue statement to help focus its effort, the group met six times to identify elk management guidelines for use in areas with brucellosis. These proposed guidelines, if endorsed by the FWP Director and Commission, are similarly aimed at helping to focus future elk management in areas with brucellosis.

On Aug. 30, the FWP Commission was presented with its first background session on the working group and its proposed recommendations. At the Oct. 11 meeting, FWP will present additional background information on surveillance and research relative to brucellosis. On Nov. 8, FWP will deliver a detailed presentation on the working group's process and results for the FWP Commission's *first* formal decision action on this topic.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

While the working group meetings were announced and open to the public there's been relatively little public comment. The public will have the opportunity to comment at the November meeting and during the subsequent comment period. Any *final* commission adoption would likely take place in early 2013 after the public comment period closes and comments have been presented to the commission.

Additional information, including brucellosis research efforts, is available via FWP's website: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/elk/areasWithBrucellosisWG/default.html>